

Invention-Formal Rigor

Adam Fieled



Preface

My purpose here is expository. By presenting a brief but potentially comprehensive aesthetics followed by a collection of poems which elucidate it, while also enacting a critique of high-level aesthetic thought, both endeavors (the composition of broadly “philosophical” poetry and the construction of systems of thought in and around aesthetics) are led to cohabit and purify each other as though they were respective Primary and Secondary modes on the Purification Chain which girds up the aesthetic thought imminent here. This incision births another quiddity—does art itself have primacy over aesthetic thought, or vice versa? The expository nature of this project means that the question doesn’t need to be answered—it is meant to subsist within itself. That the poems in “Quiddities” address both philosophy (both in the general sense and the manner in which philosophy and poetry interrelate) and aesthetic thought derived from serious art leads the pdf into meta-ironies and an intense sense of internalized interrogation, ending for both halves in an ethereal and “multiplying” transcendentalism, suggesting eruptions into ontological self-awareness and verticality.

Yet the self-enclosed (“concealed”) system is “bounded,” in the Heideggerian sense, by an assumed privileging of the aesthetic, the ground of which is the assumed compatibility and complementary quality of the purely aesthetic and the purely philosophical, when the Primary mode (philosophy) chooses to let itself be purified, on minor and major levels, by the Secondary mode (the aesthetic), and that aesthetic correlatives purify the properly philosophical by creating symbolic ground where philosophy can perceive its structures mirrored with recourse not only to profound thought, but to profound emotion and to complex humanistic interest. The inventiveness of this pdf is its form—and the rigor of its interrogations, though it cannot purify the gestalt into a sharp edge which can incise into higher philosophical forms, nonetheless symbolizes the ground from which these incisions can be made.

The most substantial incision here is represented by an interrogation of symbolic representation (as manifested in poetic, i.e. symbolic language) confronted by the purified invention-formal rigor nexuses of pure ontology, phenomenology, mechanical apparatuses of pure metaphysics. The ground of symbolization is lower than the ground of discursive metaphysical inquiry—but it nonetheless adds a level and layer of richness to cognition aimed at metaphysical imperatives (even if, as in Deconstructionism, the discourse involves the metaphysics of language itself). The construct of Primary and Secondary modes is that the Secondary can symbolically be represented as “beneath”—in some cases, there is a necessity to its playing an undergirding role, in some cases (as here) the undergirding is evanescent and void of necessity—maybe. The manner of undergirding the Secondary has here (poetry to philosophy) suggests an ambiguity around what constitutes cognitive impoverishment and what can deny value over a prolonged period of time—what the roots of purified cognition are, and how symbolic representation, having provided the original ground, need not fade into evanescence “beneath” the process of metaphysical incision.

Adam Fiedl, 2013

AESTHETICS PT. 1

Adam Fieled



THE CHAIN OF PURIFICATION

SECONDARY MODES

Invention

World (H's)

Dionysian

Clearing (H's)

Intellect

Idea (S's)

I-You (B's)

Content

PRIMARY MODES

Formal Rigor

Earth (H's)

Apollonian

Concealing (H's)

Physicality

Will (S's)

I-It (B's)

Form

- These opposites exist in a symbiotic relationship in a work of high art.
- These opposites purify each other by persevering in balance, rather than conflict, as Heidegger claims, and in the manifestation of both beauty and truth.

H= Heidegger

S= Schopenhauer

B= Buber

- Schopenhauer's conception of the aesthetic: the artist, he claims, is capable of seeing things apart from the forms of the principle of sufficient reason; apart from space, time, causality, and as Platonic forms, ideas. This is true, inasmuch as the artist has been trained and attained to formal rigor. The problem with Schopenhauer's schema is that he perceives genius as a manner of seeing, rather than doing. Most educated people can train themselves to see things independent of the principle of sufficient reason; what we might call transcendent will, the possession of few, is accessible to many. Formal rigor, the "in-itselfness" of particular works of art, is possessed by few and accessible to few. Formal rigor is inborn (ineffable) talent met by patience and perseverance; these are the virtues of genius, and they have little to do with modes of seeing.
- Schopenhauer goes on to remark that, in effect, men of genius are like blinkered horses, clumsy, errant, irrational, easily used and manipulated. History teaches us, however, that geniuses from Picasso to Byron to Chaucer are just as inclined to manipulate as to be manipulated. Genius is a form of power, a kind of knife, and to hold that knife, and to know that you hold it, is to become a kind of avenger. Time, space, and causality are mere forms, no more or less real than the forms of art, so genius is free to play as it wishes; and it doesn't relate, it swallows.
- Intellectual naivete is linked with the idea of a universal genius. Genius is relative, subject to the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, to change, impermanence, uncertainty. "Genius" cannot be resuscitated fully to save us.
- This is the moral purpose behind creativity: to save our capacity to find our way past the forms of the principle of sufficient reason. Those pursuing formal rigor are, as Nietzsche would say, arrows of longing for the other shore: prolonged occurrence, extended emotion, eternal Eros.
- John Keats, in "Nightingale," dramatizes the artist experiencing the momentary sensation of transcendent will; transcending, in the process, the forms of the principle of sufficient reason (in "Hyperion," this objectivity is implied.) The poem's intricate, sublimely musical prosody exemplifies formal rigor; its' conception of the original innocence (or beginning or soul) of nature is fundamentally inventive in acuity of personal, psychological perception. Keats revels in what Rilke calls nature's "dim delight"; a manifestation of the open, the being of beings in their Heideggerian "shieldedness." So Keats' "world" is nature; his earth is himself. He reveals a desire for concealment from selfness through

nature; yet nature is seen to be “clearing.” Keats conceals himself through the physical act of creation, which purifies an idealized nature.

- Keats in “Nightingale,” also: he is standing in relation to his nightingale, which is perceived as an archetypal manifestation of the openness of nature; he is, in Buber’s words, “confronted bodily,” drawn into a saying of I-You; yet, in the expanse of the poem, Keats must relate the nightingale as a thing, an experience, an It. So Keats’ expression, his I-It, is purified by the world of his relation. Thus, I-You in a work of art is something interior; I-It is something outwardly manifested; but before the I-You can be manifested as an It, it must be felt as well as thought. Feeling mediates thinking and materializing in a work of art, as a purifying agent. Just as the manifestation of objectivity in a longer poem like “Hyperion,” is purified by a sense of the poet’s empathy, which invents the possibility of catharsis from an apotheosis of blank verse as a form.
- Heidegger argues that the poet moves us from the “unshieldedness” of purposeful self-assertion, production, marketplace, technology, to the open, the pure draft, the venture, nature, the being of beings. Yet much of modern poetry features a reduced sense of naturalness and a heightened sense of artificiality. Eliot’s “Prufrock” and Baudelaire’s “Flowers of Evil” and “Paris Spleen” showcase this sense of purposeful self-assertion, of the artificial. Heidegger does not address the preponderance of urban decay and urban despair in the psyche of Modern poetry, that gives rise to the artificial character of an Eliot or a Baudelaire, and the generations which followed them. The city, in modern poetry, becomes a revelation of the unshielded; and the revelation of form tempestuous with conflict.
- Formal rigor is, in itself, a mode of unshieldedness, of purposeful self-assertion, production. When it is purified by invention, formal rigor takes on the qualities of earth, in the Heideggerian sense; newly willed earth, produced earth, just as “Prufrock” is the invention of an archetype, the individual as realization of irony. As such, nature, the being of beings, the pure draft, is itself purified, in a manner of speaking, by a happening of truth, the purposeful self-assertion of the unnatural quality of the age. “Prufrock” has as a constituent level romanticism’s signature melodic style in irony’s minor key.
- Baudelaire, in “The Gaming Table,” proclaims himself to be “Envyng creatures their tenacious lust/ These rattling skeletons their deadly mirth/ Envyng all of those who gaily thrust/ Honor and Beauty to rot beneath the Earth.” Here: a longing for unshieldedness, nature as unnatural, and Man, with his capacity for abstract thought (reason), who cannot venture but to purposefully self-assert, to emerge out of artifice. Baudelairian invention, his world, entails a movement into the unshieldedness of withdrawal.
- Schopenhauer ascribes to the intellect a secondary place in human consciousness,

less important than the fundamental and basic character of will. We have seen, on the purification chain, that in a work of high art, will is correlative to formal rigor (physicality, earth, grounding, etc) and idea is correlative to invention (intellect, world, bestowing, etc). It is clear that in high art contexts, the preponderance of formal rigor must make itself felt. A purely imaginative work without sufficient grounding is less effective than a purely formal work without sufficient invention.

Adam Field 2001-2013

Quiddities

Adam Fieled



Apologia

Ezra Pound famously remarked that when poetry strays too far from music, it ceases to be poetry. I would like to opine, as a tangent thought to his, that when the higher arts stray too far from philosophy, they cease to be the higher arts. Philosophy, no less than literature, is a series of narratives; and that higher-end, intellectually ambitious literature should twirl and torque meaningfully around philosophical quandaries and discourses is something that English-language poetry has forgotten in the last half-century (and I mean “pure” philosophy, as differentiated from literary theory or aesthetics). The leveling process by which no distinctions between high and low art are made, as a precondition to post-modernity’s preponderance, has effaced interest in the “fundamental questions” in favor of narrow, nihilistic ironies and corrosive but intellectually superficial cultural critiques. But that, without reprising Romanticism, English language poetry can reclaim interest in pure philosophy and the crux questions of human existence, is the assumption these poems make. As such, they are angled against everything in the English language oeuvre after T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets,” including the array of Deconstructive, non-narrative poetics, which confuse the respective (though not completely antithetical) functions of philosophy and poetry in an excessive and demeaning alienation of the aesthetic.

How my approach differs from Eliot’s is this— rather than compressing the sensory data relevant to his inquiry into succinct forms, he prefers to paint on a wide canvas. The sharp points of his piece, often expressed in axioms and aphorisms, suffer a dissipated sense of being too generalized; an intermittent chiasmus with the tactile is represented, but focus is all too often lost in digression and imprecisely motivated meanderings. Many of Eliot’s axioms are, in fact, quotations (from, among others, Heraclitus and St. John of the Cross); and his Modernistic allusiveness chips away at the potential philosopher’s stone of original cognition for him. The poems in “Quiddities” are compressed and formed in the manner of John Keats’ Odes; not, of course, that the poems are odes, just that they are meant to convey mystery-in-brevity; and a sense, however sodden with disillusionment and despair, of enchantment. For enchantment in intellectual mystery, where English language verse is concerned, few poems but these Apparition Poems after the English Romantics will suffice. Modernism and post-modernism presented many shortcuts to a sense of engaged cognition; but the full enchantment of the depths and mysteries of the human mind and its powers of perception and discernment was not perceived or represented. Impulses which could have led to these representations were deemed too earnest, in a milieu and context which prized irony, and mistrust of any form of depth, especially subjectively maintained cognitive-affective depth, with or against impulses which could be deemed Romantic.

If “Quiddites” is not merely a reprise of Romantic impulses, it is because the mysteries the poems encompass and close on are not comforting. Wordsworth’s conception of intellectual enchantment is positivist; he follows a pedagogical path to teach us, with a discrete, didactic, and circumscribed system, how to think. This is the thematic backbone of “The Prelude,” his masterpiece. Intellectual man, he informs us, can always fall back on Nature; and Nature has the capacity to endlessly replenish intellectual man. The other major Romantics offer more naïve versions of the same intermittently comforting premise; even if Byron and Keats have ways of building levels of permanent encroaching darkness into their visions, too. The intellectual enchantment in “Quiddities” ends in itself; the poems offer no

system as a transcendental antidote, and nothing is endlessly replenishing in the poems except the endless montage of thought (thoughts on more thoughts). The enchantment offered by “Quiddities” is strange and (in a contradictory way) bitter; cognition has no recourse but to recur endlessly, in a sensory landscape as blasted and dystopic as the poems themselves. To circle back to Eliot again, where “Quiddities” is concerned; it is cognition over the (or a) waste land. But that the human intellect can and should develop its own kind of narcissism, over the dictatorial narcissism of the senses, especially in America, is presupposed. The human mind is the only enchanted place with any genuine permanence for mankind; that is the key and primordial supposition here.

Adam Fieled, 2013

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#1617

Philosophy says that poets want to lose.
What are conditions of losing: to whom?
The conditions (to whom they concern, to

unrepresented phantoms, mostly) are colors,
which, to transcribe, require a solid core of
nebulous necromancy which philosophy calls

(for its own poetic reasons) “loss.” I took this
from one strictly (which necessitated looseness
towards me) for himself, took several median

blended colors and painted a razor on the roof
of a red building. Then I fell off. But I lived.

#1622

Poor Schopenhauer's axioms:
all in the will is a fight to beat
other wills. I see him in his
meager room, his will bent
not to do much, save himself
the trouble of fighting these
ineluctable battles, but not
able to refrain from eating,
breathing, shitting, fucking,
all those simple acts that are
will-to-survival, but Arthur
casts himself into a future of
power, not knowing when it
arrived it was to be a crass joke,
ended with face in turtle soup.

#1625

The “I” that writes cannot be
(he told us, perched on a hill of
flowers which he crushed, but, of
course, incompletely, and not all of
them at once) strictly for-itself as it
has no substance: a student walked

up, pricked his forearm (the back side
of it) with a small razor, he cringed but
only briefly, leaning forward so that a
row of buttercups doused him yellow.
The “I” that writes has a relationship
that is very much for itself, but it has

a strictly independent existence, so that
what constitutes a human “I” has no
meaning for it. Now, you need to know
this: I was not the student with the razor,
but I supplied the razor to the student
that cut the professor’s forearm, but you

will never know how I got it, or why.

#1476

Days follow days off cliffs—
do these things we do have
any resonance, do they rise
into the ether, or are they to
be ground down into pulp,
briefly making earth sodden,
then dissipated dust scattered
over plains too vast, blasted
with winds, rains, storms, to
be counted or harvested?

#1480

How horrendous, to realize there
are people in the world with no
soul, walking zeros, hollow spaces,
dead end interiors, permanently
frozen faculties, how horrendous
to watch how they borrow words
of others to sound profound, but
each echo reveals there's nothing
behind it but the kind of charred
silence that comes after a corpse
is burnt— how horrendous, how
it makes some of us cling to what
we feel, how we feel, that we feel,
and that everything we feel is so
precious, specifically (and only)
because it is felt, and stays felt.

#1281

You can take for granted
lots of God-awful garbage
in places deemed important
by fools; this goes for every
thing, including poetry. Why?
Because the world runs (has,
will always) on mediocrity, so
safe, so comforting, like a mug
of hot cocoa on a winter's night,
or a mediocre simile, people want
others to be mediocre, to be fools,
that's just the way things go, people
are nothing to write home about, or
(if you are writing to God) nothing to
write about at all, the world is no mystery,
all the mystery is in the night sky, looking up.

#1241

Why does no one tell the truth?
Because the truth is (more often
than not) absurd. No one wants
to look absurd, so no one tells
the truth, which creates even
more absurdity; worlds grow
into self-parody, systems grow
down into gutters, whole epochs
are wasted in perfidy; Cassandra
finally opens her mouth, no one
listens, they want her to star in
a porno, set her up with a stage-
name, she learns not to rant,
visions cloud her eyes, cunt—

#1168

The essential philosophical question
is incredibly stupid—
why is it that things happen? You can
ask a thousand times,
it won't matter— nothing does, except
these things that
keep happening, “around” philosophy.

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans “I,”
what I wants—

Credits

Artrecess2— 1625

Great Works (UK)— 1067

Jacket Magazine— 1345, 1476, 1480

PFS Post— 1613

Sawbuck Poetry— 1617

Stoning the Devil— 1168, 1241

(all poems in this collection are drawn from the Blazevox '10 book "Apparition Poems")

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